

SHORTGRASS COUNTRY by Monte Noelke

Neither the county sheriff nor the grand jury for the district court ordered me to go to Austin for the January meeting of the Texas Water Well Driller's Board. Sorry to say, but I went on my own free will and at my own expense.

Battle lines were already drawn beforehand, and had been for eight or nine weeks. In one camp the board, supported by groups of pump men and drillers, had concocted 40 pages of rules, making the completion of water wells and the fishing for bottom check valves a major affair of agency and state.

Crowded in the audience were the herders and farmers who were going to have to shell out the dough to comply with these restrictions. Caught in between was a delegation of windmill and pump repairmen, showing grave concerns about their roles as policemen to report customers failing to conform to the acts.

After I'd sized up these terrible combinations, I chose to sit as far away from the various camps as dimensions of the room allowed. I made a big show of draping the raincoat I was using as a stage prop over the bench. I made a bigger show of straightening my tie and rearranging my plaid vest and dark jacket, hoping the in-house lawyers and the aides and board members would think I was a prominent rice farmer

from the Coastal Plains, or the manager of a big golf course north of Fort Worth who'd scorn anything to do with water except dark mossy marshes and clear flowing springs.

Things opened in discord. At first, copies of the rules were denied the audience. However, a Congressman bounded down the aisles and refreshed the chairman on the laws of public meetings, and copies were then passed around the room.

The calendar of life teaches that as the whiskers change to gray, man should stop seeking where he isn't sought. Also, all should know at that point to stay out of games where the dealer is the only one allowed to cut the cards.